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UAW Asks Better Work Conditions, End of 'Totalitarian' Surveillance

By Frank C. Porter
Staff Reporter

ATLANTIC CITY, March 24 — The United Auto Workers declared war today on management's use of lie detectors, hidden microphones, closed-circuit television, psychiatry and other forms of worker surveillance "reminiscent of the totalitarian horror warned against by (George) Orwell in his book '1984'."

The fight against surveillance was stressed as part of the improvement in working conditions which the UAW has given top priority among its contract demands on the automobile industry this year.

On the union's No. 2 demand, improved pensions, a threatened floor fight at the UAW's 19th constitutional convention here was averted when President Walter P. Reuther reached a compromise with leaders of the militant Local 599 of Flint, Mich.

Reuther told the delegates that the all-important 1964 bargaining resolution will be interpreted to permit varying pension demands on a company-by-company basis.

The Flint Local has spearheaded the "25-30-60" campaign. This calls for retirement at half pay after 25 years of service at two thirds pay after 30 years and at double the present rate of $2.80 a month per year worked at the age of 60.

In opposing this plan, Reuther has sought some formula whereby retirement would be earlier than the present mandatory quitting age of 68 but would be phased over four or five years so that employes would work progressively fewer hours prior to retirement.

Oddly enough, not a single member rose during the day-long debate to ask more emphasis on wage increases, which was placed well down on the agenda of bargaining demands.

The bargaining resolution passed with a lone dissenting vote among the nearly 2500 delegates attending the week-long convention.

Much of the floor discussion centered on the campaign for more humane treatment by management. Auto workers, the resolution stated, "are entitled to be free of abuses to their dignity and privacy such as closed-circuit television espionage reminiscent of Orwell's '1984' and Charlie Chaplin's 'Modern Times.' They are entitled to such elementary consideration as the installation of doors on toilet stalls. This year's negotiations will provide an opportunity to teach the major corporations proper respect for the human rights of their workers."

Speakers told of a "four-way listening system" installed at General Motors' Baltimore plant, of "bugged" union halls and company washrooms, of worker performance constantly monitored by magnetic tape, of employe intimidation through the use of polygraph and company psychiatrists.

The UAW also warned it will press its fight against the "speedup" of auto production lines.

Vice President Leonard Woodcock charged General Motors with "sheer cheating" by bypassing regular controls with a secret pushbutton which could be used to speed up the line at its Kansas City plant in violation of the union contract.

Other union demands are increases including a cost-of-living factor in pensions of present retirees, full company payment of medical costs for retired workers, a union voice in disposition of pension funds, longer vacations and vacation bonuses.

On Wednesday's agenda is the re-election of officers, considered routine since no contest is expected to develop over major offices. The convention ends Thursday with an address by AFL-CIO President George Meany.

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